Abstract

Despite a steady stream of international advertising literature, there is still much uncertainty and debate over standardisation, with a reported lack of clarity over what it means (Ryans, 1969; Levitt, 1983; Kernan and Domzal, 1993; Wills et al., 1991; Harvey, 1993), and what impact it has (Jain 1989). To date, no widely accepted framework exists to guide advertisers in this regard (Taylor & Johnson, 2002), and given the continuing growth of globalisation and international advertising, this is a critical area for knowledge development (Florin & Ogbuehi, 2004). The contribution of this paper is the development of a conceptual framework that amalgamates a number of prior studies in a bid to provide guidance for academics and practitioners within the field of international advertising.

Introduction

“The controversy over the use of standardised versus localised advertising approaches may continue for decades” (Kanso, 1992, p.11). For nearly eighty years, international marketing strategy standardisation has been the central focus of academics and practitioners (Agarwal, 1995). In the last 40 years, research has focused on this topic, from an advertising perspective (Levitt, 1983; Boddewyn et al., 1986; Kotler, 1986; Wind, 1986; Wills et al., 1991; Samiee and Roth, 1992; Baalbaki and Malhotra, 1993, Szymanski et al., 1993; Cavusgil and Zou, 1994; Agarwal, 1995; Solberg, 2000; Zou and Cavusgil, 2002). Despite steady contribution by an array of authors, the body of knowledge has not moved forward significantly and hence the call for further study in a recent special issue of the Journal of Advertising (Taylor, 2005).

There is a reported lack of clarity associated with what is meant by standardisation (Ryans, 1969; Levitt, 1983; Kernan and Domzal, 1993; Wills et al., 1991; Harvey, 1993). Jain (1989) suggests that few results about the efficacy of international advertising have yet been reached. To date, no widely accepted model exists to guide advertisers in making decisions regarding standardisation (Taylor & Johnson, 2002), and given the continuing growth of globalisation and the size of the international advertising industry with US$336.2 bil. spent per annum (Datamonitor, 2004), this is a critical area for both academics and practitioners (Florin & Ogbuehi, 2004).

James and Hill (1991) note that advertisers lack specific guidelines in terms of when they should seek to standardise and when they should choose to specialise their campaigns. This indicates the need for some sort of framework to help guide decision makers through this difficult process. The purpose of this paper is to present a conceptual framework, which is founded on the earlier work of a number of key authors (eg Jain 1989, Mueller 1989, Harvey 1993, Harris 1994, Florin, J. & Ogbuehi 2004).

The Question of Standardisation

One of the key issues regarding the debate of whether to standardise or localise international advertising campaigns is definitional in terms of what is meant by ‘standardisation’ (Moriarty and Duncan, 1991; Samiee & Roth, 1992). Walters, (1986) elaborates on this confusion by...
asking if by standardisation, previous authors were referring to total standardisation or modified forms. The definition adopted for this paper is by Deng, Jivan, and Hassan (1994) which defines a standardised advertisement as one in which the main theme is maintained with changes made to the copy or illustration and a localised advertisement as one that has been specifically developed for a local market.

Advertisers are faced with a complex array of choices and previous research has indicated that various forms of standardisation can be adapted to accommodate a variety of circumstances (Harris, 1994; Peebles, Ryan, and Vernon, 1977; Walters, 1986). This suggests that rather than debating whether standardisation is ‘right or wrong’, it is more appropriate to consider the degree of standardisation that is appropriate (Sorenson and Weichmann, 1975; Boddewyn et al., 1986). Kanso and Nelson (2002) found that local concerns must be considered for successful international advertising campaigns. Banerjee (1994) stresses that an astute international advertiser would choose to follow a ‘glocal’ approach by thinking globally, acting locally, and managing regionally, with built-in mechanisms to facilitate responsiveness and sensitivity at the regional or local level. Onkvisit and Shaw (2002) suggest that whenever possible, an international advertiser should avoid both standardisation and localisation and opt instead for a universal advertisement that is both global and local at the same time. This ‘glocal’ approach achieves the best of both worlds by combining the efficiency of standardisation with the effectiveness of localisation. Svensson (2001) suggests ‘glocal strategy’ / ‘glocalisation’ may indeed be a compromise to improve the present usage of the term global strategy.

Framework for Standardisation in Global Advertising

In an endeavour to consolidate what is known, or has been reported, within the area of international advertising, the following framework has been developed and is presented at Figure 1. Each section of the framework is discussed subsequently.

**Figure 1: Model of Standardisation Response in International Advertising**
1. Influences on standardisation

According to the literature, a number of factors may influence standardisation, and hence can also be described as the potential barriers to adopting a standardised approach. These are represented on the left-hand side of the framework and are discussed individually below:

**Product Category**

Few products are truly global in the sense that they appeal to all cultures, within all countries around the globe (Byfield and Caller, 1997). Product category is one of the most important factors in international advertising, and has been especially relevant in the standardisation vs. localisation debate (Taylor and Johnson, 2002). Universal products, up-market products, state-of-the-art technology, industrial products and new products are more easily standardised (Moriarty and Duncan, 1990). Fashion has appeal across cultures due to its ability to allow the consumer to express their individuality (Domzal and Kernan, 1993). However, food, consumer products, established products and products with simple technologies, are more culturally bound and subsequently require localisation (Moriarty and Duncan, 1999). Other research has supported this, asserting that the more culture-bound the product is, the more difficult it is to transfer advertising strategy as the product attributes don’t generalise easily (Dunn, 1976; Walters, 1986; Kotler, 1986; Wind, 1986; Onkuisit and Shaw, 1987; James and Hill, 1991; Kanso, 1992; Harvey, 1993).

**Local Market**

Porter (1986), Prahalad and Doz (1987), Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989) and Grein and Ducoffe (1998) identified diverse consumer preferences, infrastructure differences, laws, physical environment, competition, and host government policies as the key factors that required international advertising responsiveness.
• **Culture**

Cultural influence has been recognised as one of the most important variables in the standardisation vs. localisation debate (Britt, 1974; Hofstede, 1997; Kapferer, 1992; Harvey, 1993; Jevons, 2000; Yip, Biscarri, and Monti, 2000; Kanso and Nelson, 2002; Cateora and Graham, 1999; Holden, 2004). There is great importance in understanding the effect of advertising on consumers from different cultures, because it enables international advertisers, especially those with global or regional intentions, to anticipate their audience and produce leading-edge work (Goodyear, 1996). Even those considered to be the most brilliant ‘advertising gurus’ must stay grounded in the reality of the consumers’ worlds (Byfield and Caller, 1997).

• **Language**

In Japan, if a kanji or hiragana symbol is not available to express a foreign concept, the Japanese can write a word in katakana so that they can pronounce it. However, someone reading the transliterated katakana can render it back into the original language, without understanding the meaning of the word (Miracle and Bang, 2002). Additionally, Miracle and Bang (2002) found that when it came to recruiting translators, it was not possible to train those with little knowledge of advertising to code as accurately as those who had substantial knowledge of advertising.

• **Competition**

In a more highly competitive local market, it may be more important to ‘speak to local voice’, depending on strength of brand, and the players, within the market. International competitive analysis allows insight for advertisers into the role of advertising within a foreign market (Porter, 1980; Harvey, 1993).

• **Government**

The increased level of regulation of advertising by foreign governments directly impacts on the applicability of standardisation. Regulations vary on the basis of religion, nationalism, and changing economic conditions (Boddewyn, 1982, Harvey 1993). What is permissible to be advertised in one region may not be in another, for example, the portrayal of nudity.

**Advertising Process**

The primary elements of the advertising process: research and development, creative, media, production, and post-advertising research all impact the choice of advertising strategy (Harvey, 1993). Ewing, Caruana, and Teo (2002) indicate that their multicultural advertising response scale (MARS) has considerable implications for international advertisers, particularly with its suitability for post-testing and tracking of multinational campaigns. At the beginning of the advertising research process, it is important to establish what is affordable and what is possible in any given market. Therefore, international advertisers must deal with inherent country inconsistencies at the start of the process (Taylor and Johnson, 2002).

Due to the various stages in economic development across the globe, some advertising media may be nearly unattainable due to uneven access to media (Gould et al., 1999). For example, America has in excess of 2000 television stations compared to Asian counterparts such as Thailand or Singapore that have approximately 6 each. One must acknowledge that different cultures are at different stages of grasping its capabilities (Griffin et al., 1998). Script-based semantic theory suggests that humour doesn’t travel (Alden et al., 1993). Therefore, when it comes to executional considerations, international advertisers should consider grouping different countries based upon their value sets in order to determine what strategy would be most effective. Advertising infrastructure impacts the ability to standardise foreign advertising according to the technical capabilities (Harvey, 1993).
Organisational Characteristics

Agencies have a variety of lines of management such as regional directors and local agency heads, any of whom may be responsible for a certain international account (Grein and Ducoffe, 1998). Many managers of multinational companies are finding the span of control associated with making advertising decisions affecting regions all around the world to be problematic (Harvey, 1993; Gould et al., 1999). The power and influence of the advertising agency plays a crucial role in whether an international advertising campaign is ultimately standardised (Taylor and Johnson, 2002). Client pressures, cost and time constraints, are increasing and appear to be leading to more standardised international campaigns than used to be the case (Duncan and Ramaprasad, 1995).

Global Characteristics

New sets of social conditions have emerged at different speeds on different parts of the globe (Byfield and Caller, 1997). Change is not a new phenomenon, but it is much faster than that experienced by previous decades and centuries. It is being delivered electronically, making it difficult to grasp its driving forces and their impact. International advertisers must be quick on their feet when it comes to making strategy decisions (Dat, 1996). Byfield and Caller, 1997 phrase this in terms of ensuring the brand remains ‘intellectually and physically fit’ across the geographic borders that our now transcended …they add “consumers do not buy brands because they are available in lots of countries; they buy them because they are relevant, meet real needs and deliver desired benefits”.

2. Standardisation Continuum

As discussed earlier, there are potentially different meanings to standardisation, in terms of what actually remains consistent. Byfield and Caller (1993) propose that variation may be based on consistency of strategy, target, idea and execution. Key elements drawn from the literature suggest that in general standardisation may relate to general categories such as language, creative, and product category (Jain 1989, Mueller 1989, Harvey 1993, Harris 1994, Florin, J. & Ogbuehi 2004). A continuum on its own offers limited appeal, particularly to practitioners who contend that beyond identifying the degree of standardisation, they also need to know what actual variables will have an impact - as per those identified in the framework (Melawar and Vemmervik 2004).

In addition, the lower section of the framework represents an aspect referred to as conseruation by Goodyear (1996). The importance of this continuum is that it provides a framework for understanding, and anticipating, cross-cultural differences. The consumption continuum implies that the international advertiser must have a strong grasp of the similarities and differences between countries in terms of the relationship of the consumer with the specific brand, the competition, the product field, and the advertising (Byfield and Caller, 1997).

3. Standardisation and Performance

Remarkably little is known about the key factors in international advertising that influence performance (Grein and Ducoffe, 1998), and the question of whether international advertisers should standardise or localise their advertising still remains unresolved in terms of its effect on performance (Florin and Ogbuehi, 2004). “All the added values of the world will only be taken seriously if they add value to the bottom line” (Goodyear, 1996, p.114). Building brand equity then protecting it at home and abroad is a challenge (Conway, 1998). Brand equity can be difficult to determine because managers rely on different key measures of performance,
especially in international advertising where global markets differ in marketing environments, competition, and diversity of market data (Wright and Nancarrow, 1999).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is essential for practitioners and academics not to view the debate as ‘either / or’ standardisation vs. localisation, but rather to see it as something to be implemented by degree, according to how favourable or otherwise the circumstances are. Whilst a number of classifications have been developed, no framework to date has captured the gamut of circumstances that potentially influence this decision process, and hence this paper represents a considerable contribution by endeavouring to amalgamate the work of many preceding studies.

Technological advancement and globalisation trends continue at dramatic rates. “If you don’t do it, somebody else soon will to your disadvantage” epitomizes a contemporary view of competitive urgency shared by an increasing number of executives of multinational firms, irrespective of nationality (Kotabe, 2002), and sometimes the decision to produce a standardized approach is driven by financial reasons of economies of scale (Weisfelder, 2001). This approach fails to take in to consideration issues such as culture and long term brand health. By establishing a framework of the influences on standardisation, there will be a basis on which to assess global advertising strategy (Moriarty & Duncan, 1991), and a guide to help determine when standardisation is feasible to implement, which would represent a major advance for academics and practitioners alike (Taylor, 2005).

References

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